

Australian Statement

**Delivered by Senator the Honourable Kay Patterson
Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister
Assisting the Prime Minister on Women's Issues**
(Check against delivery)

Madam Chair

Australia reaffirms our strong commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and welcomes this opportunity to review our achievements and further its implementation.

Australia expressed its hope at the last meeting that the 49th Session would provide an opportunity for participants to exchange views on lessons learned and share best practice which would assist countries in moving forward the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

There are important links to be drawn between the Beijing process, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in order to maximise, rather than dissipate, the effectiveness of our efforts to improve the lives of women.

The reports that the regional groupings submitted to CSW 49 make it clear that despite the many differences between individual countries and regions, there are threads of common interest that we can address. International cooperation to achieve tangible results for women in these areas of common interest is crucial.

From our reading of the regional reports, some of these common threads under the 12 areas for action are: the feminisation of poverty; under-representation of women and girls in non-traditional fields of study; HIV/AIDS; cultural and social issues that hamper States' efforts to combat violence against women; the trafficking of women and children; implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325; valuing women's unpaid work; the gender wage gap; linking the Beijing process with other international processes for the advancement of women; accessing reliable and relevant sex-disaggregated data; and continuing stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

The importance of the commitments made by so many countries in Beijing, which Australia hopes will be reaffirmed at CSW 49, should not be under-estimated. While the challenges faced by states vary, remaining united in our desire to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will help us all achieve our goal of gender equality for women and girls around the world.

In Australia, we have made significant inroads across the Beijing Platform for Action's 12 critical areas. Today our women have the same or better outcomes than men in several key areas, such as education and health, and continue to make steady progress in other areas.

Women's participation in both full and part-time employment has increased and continues to increase with women steadily making their way into what have been traditional male occupations and industries. About one third of small business operators in Australia are now women.

Maximising the retirement savings of Australians has been a key objective of successive Australian governments. Women are benefiting from the Government's requirement that a large proportion of employers make compulsory contributions to employees' retirement incomes. A recently introduced government bonus and other government measures are particularly benefiting women.

Australia has a new universal Maternity Payment for each new born child, which ensures that new mothers have financial assistance at this crucial period in their lives. Coupled with ongoing government payments to assist families with children, and assistance to pay

for good quality childcare, Australia has maintained its solid record of supporting families.

Australia attaches a high priority to combating domestic violence and sexual assault and trafficking of women and children. Priorities for ongoing work to combat violence against women include increased community education and awareness, funding of services, training for service providers and improvements to the criminal justice system. Targeting family violence and child protection in Indigenous communities is a key priority.

Australia's overseas aid program is guided by a Gender and Development Policy which reinforces many of the critical areas in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Within Australia's humanitarian and refugee program there is a category which seeks to protect vulnerable women for whom the UNHCR deems resettlement is the only option.

Our delegation represents a broad Australian perspective and experience and comprises representatives of our government, non-government organisations, our indigenous community and our human rights institutions. As a mark of the importance Australia places on issues concerning women living in rural and remote communities our Deputy Prime Minister has sent the Chair of his Rural Women's Advisory Council to this meeting.

Last year we celebrated 100 years of the right for women to both vote and stand for election to the national parliament.

Australia is proud of our record of action for women both within Australia and in our assistance to other nations through our international aid program. Over the last ten years, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have provided an important and consistent reference point by which we can all measure our progress. Reaffirming our ongoing commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will allow us to continue to consolidate and build upon our achievements since Beijing so that women can realise their full potential in the dynamic environment of the twenty first century.

Thank you.